BRITISH COLUMBIA

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highlights

a weekly digest of recently released British Columbia statistics

Labour Force

- **British Columbia's unemployment rate decreased 0.3 percentage points in May, falling to a seasonally adjusted (SA) level of 8.8%.** Employment gains of 1,600 helped bring last month's unemployment rate down. A smaller labour force also contributed to the decrease in the unemployment rate, as 3,400 British Columbians either stopped working or looking for work in May. Fewer women (7,300) had jobs, but 8,900 more men were employed than in April.

  The Canadian unemployment rate decreased from 9.6% to 9.5% between April and May. The improvement at the national level was due to employment gains, as 61,300 Canadians found jobs. This increase was more than enough to accommodate the 50,500 Canadians who joined the labour force in May. Employment rose in six of the ten provinces, with the strongest proportional gains occurring in Ontario (40,600), Alberta (9,900) and Nova Scotia (2,600). However, the number of people with jobs was down in the rest of Atlantic Canada and in Manitoba.

  Source: Statistics Canada

- **The province's youth unemployment rose 0.7 percentage points to 15.8% (SA 3-month moving average) in May.** This was 1.7 percentage points higher than in May 1996. Despite the increase, youth unemployment in the province was below the national average of 17.2%, and Manitoba (12.3%), Alberta (11.9%) and Saskatchewan (10.3%) were the only provinces with lower unemployment rates for young people. However, students looking for summer work continued to have difficulty finding jobs. Unadjusted data for May indicate that the unemployment rate for students aged 15-to-24 was 21.9% in BC, compared to 13.9% for individuals in the same age group who were not attending school full-time. BC's student unemployment rate was the third highest in the country, after Newfoundland (47.4%), Nova Scotia (39.2%) and New Brunswick (27.4%). The national average was 21.6%. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **British Columbia's help wanted index continued to climb in May, rising 1 point to 76 (1991=100).** The index had been trending downward since the beginning of the decade, but has begun to move up during the last nine months. BC's help wanted index has gained 12 points since last August. Canada's help wanted index rose 4 points to 106 in May, as nine of the ten provinces recorded increases, while Newfoundland's index remained at its April level.

  Source: Statistics Canada

The Economy

- **The Port of Vancouver was the busiest in Canada last year, easily outpacing any other port in the country.** More than a quarter (26.7%) of Canada's international marine shipments went through Vancouver last year. Sept-Iles/Pointe Noire, the country's second busiest port, handled 22.6 million tonnes of cargo. Higher international shipments of coal (+3.9%) and sulfur (+7.6%) helped boost the total cargo handled by the Port of Vancouver to 71.3 million tonnes, 2.5% more than in 1996. However, domestic cargo shipments were down 25.2% from 1995, to 2.0 million tonnes. Canadian port activity fell 0.7% last year, to 357.9 million tonnes, as domestic tonnage continued a decade-long decline. However, the volume of international cargo handled by Canadian ports was 3.3% higher than in 1995, at 260.3 million tonnes. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Report **No feature report this week**

Did you know...?

The open pit of the Island Copper Mine outside Port Hardy was the lowest open air point on earth, at 1,320 feet below sea level (the Dead Sea, the next lowest point, is 1,296 feet below sea level). The pit has been flooded with sea water and is being topped off with fresh water to form a lake that is 1,000 feet deep, with a surface area of 530 acres. It is expected to be completed by 2001.

- **Sales of existing homes in British Columbia increased 19.4% (SA) between March and April.** This was the first time since last November that seasonally adjusted home sales have risen. New listings were also up for the first time since November, increasing 10.9%. The average home sold in the province in April was valued at $224,883, down 0.2% from April 1996 ($225,241). Nationally, home sales rose 11.4%, and the average home sold for $158,524 in April.
  Source: Canadian Real Estate Association

- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities declined 16.1% (SA) between March and April**. Residential permits issued in the province were down 13.5%, while permits for non-residential construction projects fell 22.1%. BC's sharp drop in planned residential construction was a major factor in a 0.9% decline in planned housing construction at the national level. However, non-residential construction intentions were up significantly (25.2%) over the previous month, bringing the total for all of Canada to 9.3% above the March level.
  Source: Statistics Canada

Public Transportation

- **Canadian usage of public transit has declined 10.7% since 1988, when it reached a peak of 1.5 billion passenger trips.** Last year, Canadians made 1.3 billion trips using urban transit, averaging 46 trips per person. This was the lowest level since 1970, when the average fell to 43 trips per person. In 1945, Canadian usage of public transit was three times as high, averaging more than 120 trips per person. Transit usage has declined in seven of the last nine years. Commuters in the major metropolitan areas (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary and Edmonton) are more likely to use public transportation than those living in smaller centres.
  Source: Statistics Canada

  In British Columbia, public transit usage increased 6.0% last year, as 15.0 million trips were made using BC Transit. Most (12.3 million) of these trips were in the Vancouver area. On a per capita basis, usage of the public transit system in BC has risen in each of the last four years. BC residents averaged 39 trips per person last year, up from 38 trips in 1995.
  Source: BC Transit, BC STATS estimate

Travel and Tourism

- **The cost of flying between small cities in Canada during the first six months of 1996 was 28.7% lower than in the same period of 1995.** This was the largest year-over-year decline in the cost of air travel in the history of Statistics Canada's air fare survey. The sharp drop coincided with the introduction of domestic air services by WestJet Airlines and Greyhound Air. Between large cities (Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto), the cost of air fares averaged 10.5 cents per kilometre, down from 12.3 cents in 1995. For medium-sized cities (those handling 2% to 10% of domestic passengers, such as Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Edmonton), the cost per kilometre fell from 17.0 cents to 15.7 cents. Air fares were highest between smaller centres, at 21.4 cents per kilometre, down from 30.0 cents in 1995. *Source: Statistics Canada*

The Nation

- **Canada's economy grew 0.8% (SA) in the first three months of 1997, as measured by real gross domestic product (GDP) at market prices.** Strong domestic demand (+1.6%) was a major factor in the economy's growth. Business investment rose 4.3%, and consumer (+1.3%) and government (+1.2%) spending on goods and services increased. Exports were up 5.3% from the fourth quarter of last year, but import growth was even stronger, at 5.5%.
  Source: Statistics Canada

- **Canadian productivity growth remained weak in 1996**. Business sector productivity rose 0.4% for the second straight year. Labour contributed 1.5 percentage points and capital 0.4 points of the 2.4% increase in real GDP last year. *Source: Statistics Canada*

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For data originating from Statistics Canada: data sourced to 'Statistics Canada' has been retrieved from CANSIM, the agency's electronic database; otherwise the source is identified as 'SC' plus the publication name or catalogue number.

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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Jan 1/97	% change on year ago
BC	3,902.5	2.2
Canada	30,135.9	1.1
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT		% change
(BC - at market prices - $ millions)	1996	on year ago
Current Dollars	103,631	1.7
Constant (1986) Dollars	74,001	1.0
TRADE ($ millions)		
Manufacturing Shipments (seas. adj.) Mar	2,884	11.5
Merchandise Exports (raw) Mar	2,356	11.0
Retail Sales (seasonally adjusted) Mar	2,691	3.3
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		% change
(all items - 1986=100)	Apr '97	on year ago
BC	139.4	0.6
Canada	137.6	1.7
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		% change
(seasonally adjusted)	May '97	on year ago
Labour Force - BC	2,002	1.6
Employed - BC	1,825	1.5
Unemployed - BC	176	3.0
		May '96
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	8.8	8.7
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	9.5	9.4
INTEREST RATES (percent)	Jun 4/97	Jun 5/96
Prime Business Rate	4.75	6.50
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	5.40	6.50
- 5 year	7.35	8.50
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	Jun 4/97	Jun 5/96
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $	1.3757	1.3657
US $ *(reciprocal of above rate)*	0.7269	0.7322
AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS		% change
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	Mar '97	on year ago
BC	604.23	1.1
Canada	593.82	2.5

SOURCES:
Gross Domestic Product: Statistics Canada, revised by BC STATS
Population, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Earnings: Statistics Canada
Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Review

Released this week by BC STATS
- No subscription releases this week

Next week
- Labour Force Statistics, May 1997
- Tourism Room Revenue, January 1997

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